The Care and Handling of Your Art Collection:
10 Things You and Your Housekeeping Staff Should Know

Assessing your home for potentially hazardous situations and providing your cleaning service, maid, butler, landscaper or other housekeeping staff with some clear and simple instructions will protect your collection. To start, you’ll want to identify items that should never be touched by household employees without prior instructions from you. And when it comes to specifics, it’s important to know the following:

1 Light-sensitive objects such as textiles or works on paper should never be displayed in direct sunlight, where they are likely to fade.

2 Climate-sensitive items such as wood, bone and ivory artifacts should never be hung over heat vents or near fireplaces, where they are more likely to dry out and crack.

3 Never pick up fragile objects with one hand.

4 Never pick up an object by its most vulnerable point, such as the handles or neck.

5 Don’t push or pull furniture. If a piece is too heavy to lift alone, get help.

6 Don’t dust with a rag or anything else that could snag on sharp or ragged edges. Use a synthetic or feather duster.

7 Never use the vacuum cleaner to pick up stray soot and then use the same brush to vacuum cobwebs off a valuable piece of art. Label a separate brush for “clean” things.

8 Mass-marketeted cleaning products and art don’t necessarily mix. Never use any sort of cleaning solution on a work of art unless a conservator has approved it.

9 Art and weed whackers don’t mix either. Have your landscaper make a bed of mulch or other barrier around an outdoor sculpture to keep it clear of machinery. Make sure your landscaper knows that unless a conservator has specified otherwise, outdoor art should be protected with plastic whenever insecticides, herbicides and other chemicals are being sprayed.

10 Don’t “sweep it under the rug”. No matter how many precautions are taken, the possibility of breakage always exists in and around the home. Make sure your household staff knows what to do if something happens. Train staff to collect and save all of the pieces. A piece of masking tape pressed to the floor to gather even the smallest fragments might be the difference between a completely successful restoration and a disappointing one.